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DATE: 9/2/04 ATTORNEY DOCKET NUMBER: KCC 4809 (K-C 16,733)
PTO FACSIMILE NUMBER: (703) 872-9306

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Applicant's Name: Mark J. Beitz et al.

Serial No. (Control No.): 10/039,238 Examiner: Torres-Velazquez

Filing Date: December 31, 2001 Art Unit: 1771

Application Title: USABLE SPLICE FOR A STABILIZED ABSORBENT AND METHOD FOR MAKING THE SPLICE

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KCC 4809 (K-C 16,733)
PATENT

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Application of Mark J. Beitz et al. Art Unit 1771
Serial No. 10/039,238
Filed December 31, 2001
Confirmation No. 7291
For USABLE SPLICE FOR A STABILIZED ABSORBENT AND METHOD FOR MAKING THE SPLICE
Examiner Norca L. Torres-Velazquez

September 2, 2004

LETTER TO PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

TO THE COMMISSIONER FOR PATENTS,

SIR/MADAM:

Claims 12-15 and 22-31 are pending in the application.

The following remarks are responsive to the Office action dated June 3, 2004.

Claim 12

Applicants respectfully request reconsideration of the rejection of claim 12 under 35 USC §103 as being obvious in view of the combination of WO 99/59907 (O'Conner) and WO 02/102665 (Lam et al.).

The present invention is particularly directed to the provision of a continuous length of absorbent material for uninterrupted sequential infeed to a processing machine. This material is typically in a large roll that is unwound in manufacturing an absorbent article. Personal care absorbent articles such as disposable diapers, training pants, other infant care products, other child care products, feminine napkins, panty liners, interlabial pads, other feminine care products, incontinence articles, and other adult care products are typically manufactured using high-speed processing machines which convert a stabilized web or ribbon of a fibrous absorbent material into an article. To prevent interruption of the

processing machine when the material in one roll is exhausted, a trailing end of each coil is spliced to a leading end of the next coil. The resulting interconnected web has essentially a continuous length and the splice has a sufficient tensile strength so that it may be provided to the machine and processed without breaking at the splice.

One drawback to conventional splicing techniques is that the splice is not fluid permeable and therefore unusable in an article. In the past, fibrous absorbent materials have been joined by an adhesive or, since they do not have smooth surfaces which readily hold an adhesive, by an adhesive tape. Adhesives and tape are substantially impermeable to fluid. As a result, it is necessary to cull all spliced regions of the absorbent material, or to cull all articles that may incorporate a portion of a spliced region, in order to remove all adhesive or tape.

The present invention comprises a continuous length of absorbent material for uninterrupted sequential infeed to a processing machine. Specifically, claim 12 is directed to a continuous length of absorbent material comprising:

a first portion of absorbent material having a trailing end;

a second portion of absorbent material having a leading end adjacent to and aligned with the trailing end of the first portion of absorbent material thereby defining an aligned junction of the first and second portions having a length extending generally transverse of the first and second portions;

the first portion of absorbent material and the second portion of absorbent material each having a length sufficient to form a plurality of absorbent articles;

a piece of splicing material attached to both of said trailing end of said first portion and to said leading end of said second portion of absorbent material such that the

splicing material extends continuously over a majority of the length of the aligned junction, said splicing material including fibers having polyolefin content and having a fluid permeability at least about 25% as great as a fluid permeability of said first portion of absorbent material and at least about 25% as great as said second portion of absorbent material.

O'Conner discloses a strip of material with splices, wherein the of material may be an absorbent material. With particular reference to Fig. 1, the trailing end of one strip (19) is spliced to the leading end of another strip (20) by stitching the ends together with yarn (21). Thus, the stitchings leave a substantial portion of the strips (19, 20) themselves exposed over the length of the aligned junction between the strips. According to O'Conner, such a configuration provides an area "A" defined between stitch holes across the butting ends and having an absorption effect which is substantially equal to that of the remainder of the strip. Thus, O'Conner teaches using stitches to in order to leave a substantial portion of the strips uncovered to thereby reduce the effect of the splice on the absorptive properties of the strip itself.

O'Conner therefore fails to show or suggest a splicing material that is attached to the trailing end of one strip and the leading end of another and extends continuously over a majority of the length of the aligned junction. While the yarn stitching is shown in Fig. 3 of O'Conner as winding continuously along the length of the seam, it does not extend continuously over the length of the seam (e.g. covering the seam) as recited in claim 12. Indeed, covering the length of the seam would violate the express teachings of O'Conner to leave uncovered a substantial portion of the strips along the length of the seam.

O'Conner also fails to teach a splicing material that includes fibers having polyolefin content and having a fluid permeability at least about 25% as great as a fluid permeability of the first portion of absorbent material and at least about 25% as great as the second portion of absorbent material. O'Conner disclose the use of yarn, but fail to teach the material construction of the yarn, or the permeability thereof relative to the permeability of the strips.

Lam et al. disclose a packing strip of material in which consecutive strips are spliced together at the respective trailing and leading ends thereof. Lam et al. particularly disclose the strips of material as containing synthetic fibers which can be heat activated to melt the fibers so that they bond together. Thus, in one embodiment (Figs. 8 and 9) of Lam et al., the trailing end of one strip and leading end of another are overlapped and heated so that the fibers from one strip are bonded to the fibers of the other to form the splice. See page 16, second and third full paragraphs. In the embodiment shown in Fig. 10, Lam et al. disclose an alternate splice in which the strips are abutted end-to-end and fibrous connections (90) are applied between the strips and heat activated to bond the fibrous connections to the fibers in the strips. See page 16, last paragraph continuing onto page 17.

As is clearly shown in Fig. 10, the fibrous connections are spaced intermittently along the length of the seam (e.g., along the width of the strips). Thus, as was the case with O'Conner, Lam et al. disclose leaving a substantial portion of the strips uncovered by a splicing material. For example, in the embodiment of Figs. 8 and 9 the seam between the strips is completely uncovered, with the one strip being bonded directly to the other. In the embodiment of Fig. 10, intermittent fibrous connections are made, but the areas in between the fibrous connections remain uncovered. Lam et al. therefore fail to show or suggest a splicing material that is attached to

the trailing end of one strip and the leading end of another and extends continuously over a majority of the length of the aligned junction.

Because O'Conner and Lam et al. each fail to show or suggest a splicing material that is attached to the trailing end of one strip and the leading end of another and extends continuously over a majority of the length of the aligned junction, a combination of these references would similarly fail to show or suggest such a feature. Thus, O'Conner and Lam et al. cannot be combined to show or suggest all of the features recited in claim 12.

Moreover, O'Conner teaches away from extending a splicing material over a majority of the length of the aligned junction, i.e., O'Conner teaches the importance of leaving a substantial portion of the strips uncovered at the seam therebetween. Thus, one skilled in the art would not be motivated by Lam et al. or any other reference to provide a splicing material that extends continuously over a majority of the length of the aligned junction between two strips because doing so would do express violence to the teachings of O'Connor.

For these reasons, claim 12 is submitted to be nonobvious and patentable over the references of record.

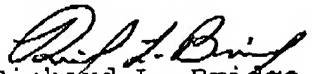
Claims 13-15 and 22-31, depending directly or indirectly from claim 12, are submitted to be nonobvious and patentable over the references of record for the same reasons as claim 12.

Conclusion

In view of the foregoing, reconsideration and allowance of claims 12-15 and 22-31 is respectively requested.

The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any fee deficiency in connection with this Letter to Deposit Account Number 19-1345 in the name of Senniger Powers.

Respectfully submitted,



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